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Opinion • Commentary

What We've Come to

Paris.

WILLIAM CASEY of the CIA has asked for more money for "human intelligence" to meet the challenge of terrorism. This responds to the wave of frustration felt by Americans at the appar-

By William Pfaff

ent lack of anything very effective to do about hijacking and terrorism. One can try to find the hijackers of the TWA airliner seized June 14, as the United States is now doing. One can put pressure on such political authorities as have an influence on the situation, as President Ronald Reagan is doing when he accuses five nations of "acts of war" against the United States. One can improve airport and aircraft security, which is dull and defensive. What people want is dramatic and cathartic action. They are unlikely to get it.

"Human intelligence," in Mr. Casey's use of that bemusing term, is the least reliable and most difficult kind of intelligence to obtain, supremely so when one is dealing with a society, as in the Eastern Mediterranean, whose norms and frame of reference differ radically from one's own.

The wartime and immediate postwar experience of Allied intelligence is instructive. The successes were nearly all scientific - breaking enemy codes, reading German and Japanese communications, photo and satellite reconnaissance, seismic and other means for monitoring nuclear experiments, etc.

"Human" effort was successful during the war mainly in deceiving the Germans about Allied moves, but this was chiefly by means of counterintelligence, the manipulation of German and Italian spies. Offensive intelligence, except for that obtained through national resistance groups, was generally unsatisfactory. By late in the war, British intelligence had lost interest even in attempting to put agents into Germany. It wasn't worth the trouble.

The penetration of religiously-motivated Islamic activist groups in the Middle East is far more difficult than gathering intelligence in German-occupied Europe, or even in the Soviet Union, where spies have sometimes been bought, and where a decadent ideology sometimes works against the regime. The risks of attempting to work through local groups in the Middle East - whose inevitable interest is to manipulate the United States to their own ends - was made clear by the recent affair of the Beirut car bomb, on their own initiative by a group in with the CIA, which killed 80 inno-

cent people.

It is indispensable that public expectations be lowered, not raised, about what can be done about terrorism. There are people in the White House who understand this. Two extremely interesting interviews were given the press just after the TWA hostages' release by National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, and a long briefing was distributed by the U.S. Information Service by a "senior U.S. official" - probably Mr. McFarlane again. Reiterated themes in these were that blind retribution and "impulsive violence" are senseless and useless, and that there are severe limits on what can be done about terrorism as a general problem. "Vengeance is not a satisfactory basis for policy," the senior official says.

In striking contrast to this has been a press clamor for cathartic violence, expressing considerable indifference to who actually may be responsible for a given terrorist action, and attributing, instead, something that looks very much like collective guilt. More of this can be expected when terrorism next strikes Americans, as it inevitably will, and it can only make increasingly difficult the kind of intelligent and discriminating policy Mr. Reagan's government pursued during the TWA affair in June.

The "nuke Beirut" attitude is widely expressed, and in some surprising quarters. David S. Broder of the Washington Post proposed that henceforth the United States attack within 72 hours any nation at all "that allows terrorists to hold Americans hostage on its territory." "If any nation is so heedless of the warning as to tolerate the terrorists then that nation and its people will have involved themselves in the crime - and will suffer the punishment." In will stride "swift and severe retaliatory punishment by U.S. military forces." How this could possibly be useful in the case of Lebanon, where government scarcely exists, and "that nation and its people" have been at war with themselves for years, is not evident.

Another writer in the same newspaper, Charles Krauthammer, wants "disproportionate response." He cites, as examples of how these matters ought to be handled, the crushing of the Solidarity movement in Poland and Russia's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In the Beirut hostage affair he would have destroyed Beirut airport - "a pirate's haven" - and attacked Iran as well, for example, its "most important economic asset," Kharg Island. "Shiite terrorist bases in Beirut and in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley" would have been bombed and shelled. William Safire of the New York Times also wanted Beirut airport and "terrorist centers" destroyed, and Greece punished as

well - probably thrown out of NATO. The *Wall Street Journal* was sneering at "Jimmy Reagan" because the bombs had not started falling in the first few days of the hijacking.

One is terribly struck not only by the ignorance revealed in these comments on the actual circumstances in the Eastern Mediterranean, but by the arrogance. Was Iran really responsible for the hijacking, or the Shiites at Beirut airport and in the Bekaa Valley, or Shiites as such, or Islam - Moslems in general - or the three men who actually set out to do the job? It does, after all, make a difference. Even more, one is struck by the apparent hatred being expressed, an indiscriminate hatred. Is this what we have come to? If so, a lot of killing lies ahead of us.

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